

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A software license manager system, comprising:
a plurality of application programs;
a plurality of license certificates that authorize
use of corresponding ones of the application programs;
5 license retrieval protocols associated with and
operable by the application programs to request license
authorizations, each of the protocols being associated
and operable with a predetermined license manager; and
a second license manager operable to intervene and
10 perform at least a portion of the functions otherwise
performed by a plurality of the predetermined license
managers.
2. The software license manager system of claim 1,
in which the second license manager is operable
transparently to the plurality of application programs.
3. The software license manager system of claim 1,
in which the application programs include a facility that
enables their selective operation with a predetermined
license manager or with the second license manager.
4. The software license manager system of claim 1,
in which the second license manager serves as a central
license manager for substantially all of the application
programs in a computer.

5. The software license manager system of claim 1, in which the second license manager serves to centralize and replace software operations normally performed by a plurality of predetermined license managers.

6. The software license manager system of claim 4, in which the license certificates are associated with, controlled and dispensed by the central license manager.

7. The software license manager system of claim 4, including a plurality of the predetermined license managers and the plurality of the predetermined license managers being operationally coupled with the central license manager.

8. The software license manager system of claim 1, including at least one predetermined license manager and the second license manager being operable to handle and store license use historical information.

9. The software license manager system of claim 8, in which the license certificates are associated with and directly controlled by the at least one predetermined license manager.

10. The software license manager system of claim 9,
in which the at least one predetermined license manager
is coupled to the second license manager and uses the
second license manager as a repository for its license
5 certificates.

11. The software license manager system of claim 1,
in which the second license manager is operable by
intercepting API (Application Program Interface) calls
issued by the plurality of application programs.

12. The software license manager system of claim
11, in which the second license manager intercepts the
API calls by carrying out a hooking process.

13. The software license manager system of claim 1,
in which the second license manager intercepts API calls
by renaming modules.

14. The software license manager system of claim 1,
in which the second license manager intercepts an API
call by executing exit routines.

15. The software license manager system of claim 1,
in which the system is operable to obtain for the
application programs license certificates without
assistance from any predetermined license manager.

16. The software license manager system of claim 1,
in which, where the predetermined license manager has an
API library that is provided as a shared runtime library
or an executing agent process, the second license manager
5 replaces the API library of the predetermined license
manager with a shared runtime library or agent process
thereof.

17. The software license manager system of claim 1,
in which the second license manager has a translator that
includes a facility that provides data compatibility
between itself and the protocols associated with a
5 plurality of the predetermined license managers.

18. The software license manager system of claim
17, in which the facility of the second license manager
is operable to provide one or more of the following
functionalities:

- 5 (a) temporary data elements, if necessary, to
contain translated data for use in API calls;
- (b) data elements in a format of one or more
tables, lists, files to retain relevant data
elements for one or more of the predetermined
10 license manager protocols or the second license
manager and their status across multiple API calls;
- (c) conversion tables between data variables;
and

15 (d) aliases to enable the protocols of the
predetermined license manager or the second license
manager to reference the same data where the
respective formats are different.

19. The software license manager system of claim
17, in which the second license manager comprises a
plurality of data translations procedures that are
implemented individually within a translator facility of
5 the second license manager.

20. The software license manager system of claim
19, in which the plurality of data translation procedures
are implemented:

5 (a) individually within the translator of the
second license manager;

(b) as a separate runtime library of
procedures that can be executed by API calls;

(c) as an external agent process; or

10 (d) by intercepting API calls of the
predetermined license manager.

21. The software license manager system of claim 1,
further including at least one predetermined license
manager and including a license certificate translator
that is operable for translating license certificates
5 created for the predetermined license manager to license
certificates that are compatible with license certificate

formats associated with the second license manager and vice versa.

5 22. The software license manager system of claim 21, in which the license certificate translator has a first set of procedures that are invoked to determine if the license certificate translator is to be employed in whole or part.

5 23. The software license manager system of claim 22, in which the first set of procedures operate by reference to a knowledge base or by calls to application program interface calls of the predetermined license manager.

5 24. The software license manager system of claim 21, in which the license certificate translator is linked in part into the at least one predetermined license manager as an object code, as a shared runtime library, or as an executing process that is accessed via its own set of API calls.

25. The software license manager system of claim 1, including at least one predetermined license manager which operates with the second license manager as dual license managers.

26. The software license manager system of claim 25, in which the at least one predetermined license manager and the second license manager cooperate to use their respective license certificates.

27. The software license manager system of claim 1, in which the second license manager develops license management information.

28. The software license manager system of claim 1, including at least one predetermined license manager having a facility for making API calls to the second license manager to obtain license certificates.

29. The software license manager system of claim 28, in which the at least one predetermined license manager communicates license use data to the second license manager for storage therein.

30. The software license manager system of claim 28, in which the software license manager system operates without any predetermined license managers.